



# SEXUAL BEHAVIOR HEALTH RISKS AMONG RHODE ISLAND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

*December 1999*

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*Rhode Island Department of Education  
in collaboration with the  
Rhode Island Department of Health*

This summary highlights selected information on sexual behaviors which affect health risks among Rhode Island high school students, based on results of Rhode Island's 1997 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS is an anonymous and voluntary survey conducted in alternate years among randomly selected samples of high school students in each of 46 participating states and territories nationwide. It was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to monitor health-risk behaviors that contribute to the major causes of mortality, disease, injury and other health and social problems among youth and adults in the United States.

During the spring of 1997 the 84-item multiple choice YRBS was administered to 1,528 randomly selected Rhode Island public school students in grades 9 through 12. With a response rate of 60.0%, results of the survey can be considered representative of all Rhode Island public school students in grades 9 through 12.

***For additional information or a more detailed report contact Cynthia Corbridge, RI Department of Education (401) 222-4600 ext. 2106 or Jana Hesser, Ph.D., Office of Health Statistics, RI Department of Health (401) 222-2550.***

## **K** *KEY FINDINGS*

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- ✓ 43% of Rhode Island high school students have had sexual intercourse in their lifetime. This includes 27% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders, and 66% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders. About 1 in 3 students (31%) had sexual intercourse during the three months preceding the survey. 6% had sexual intercourse for the first time before age thirteen, and 12% have had four or more sexual partners during their life.
- ✓ Correct and consistent use of latex condoms has been shown to reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancy, STDs, and HIV infection among sexually active persons. Of students who had sexual intercourse during the past three months, slightly more than half (52%) used a condom during last sexual intercourse. Condom use was highest among sexually active 9<sup>th</sup> graders (70%) and lowest among 12<sup>th</sup> graders (33%).
- ✓ Alcohol and drug use may contribute to unsafe sexual activity by lowering inhibitions and impairing judgement, especially among adolescents. 24% of female students and 42% of male students who had sexual intercourse during the past three months drank alcohol or used drugs before their last sexual intercourse.
- ✓ Across the country, 87,000 people in their twenties have been diagnosed with AIDS. Because it takes ten years on average for HIV related symptoms to appear, it is highly likely that many of these young people became infected with HIV when they were teenagers. 95% of Rhode Island high school students were taught about AIDS or HIV infection in school; 58% have talked about AIDS or HIV infection with their parents or other adults in the family, including 66% of female students, and 51% of male students.

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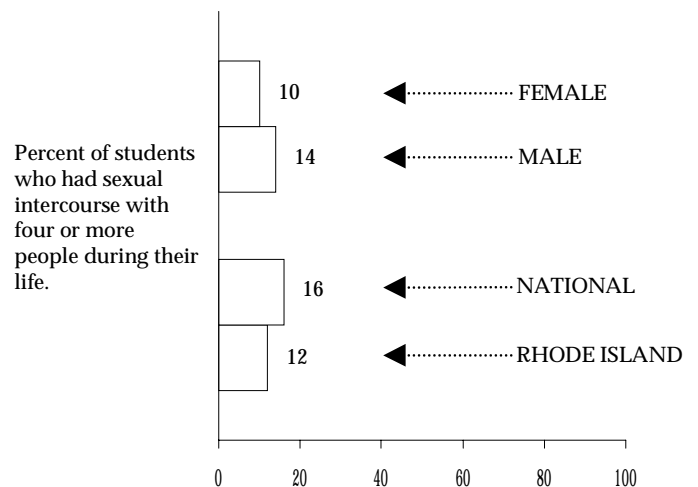
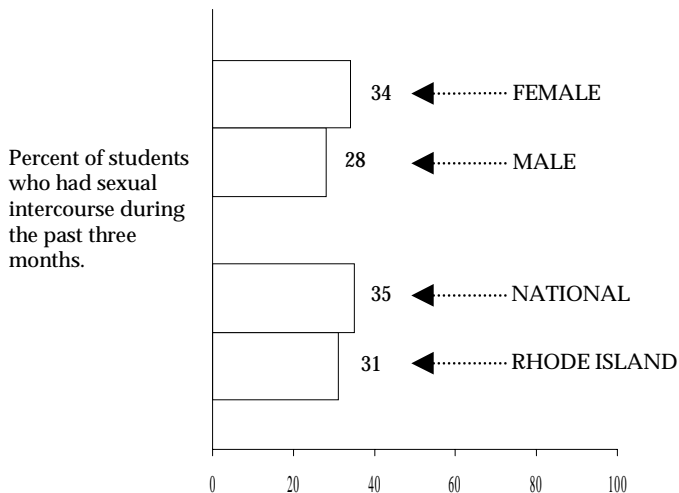
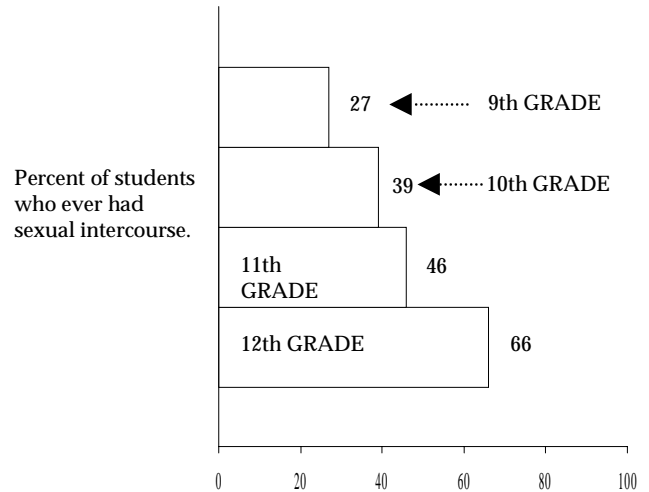
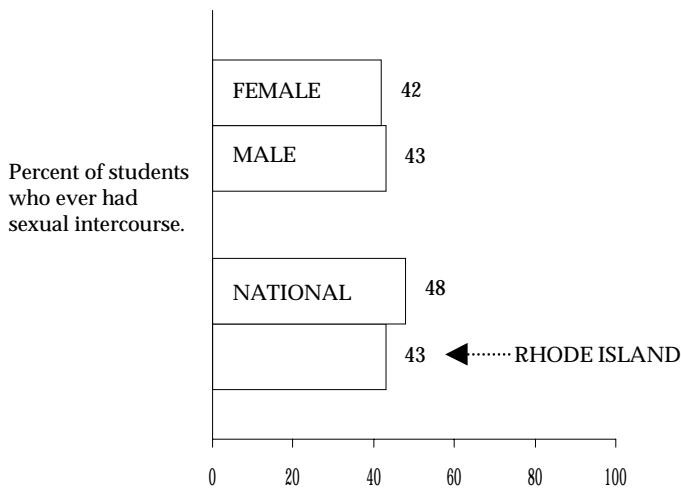
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# Sexual Behaviors

**Risk Behavior:** Early sexual activity and multiple partners

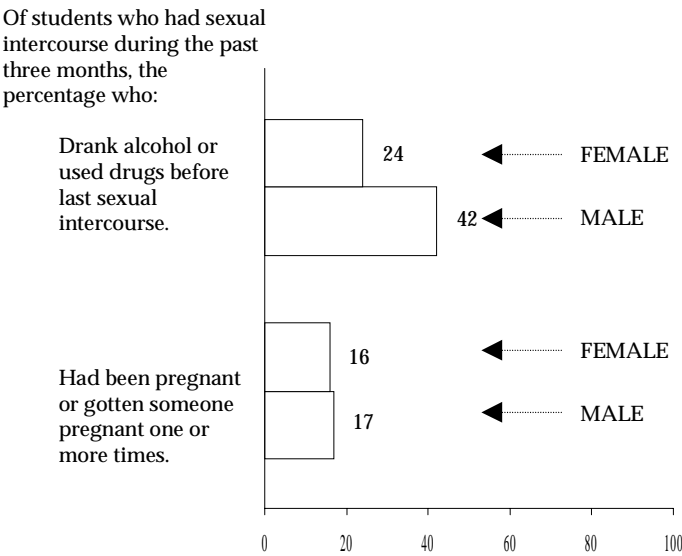
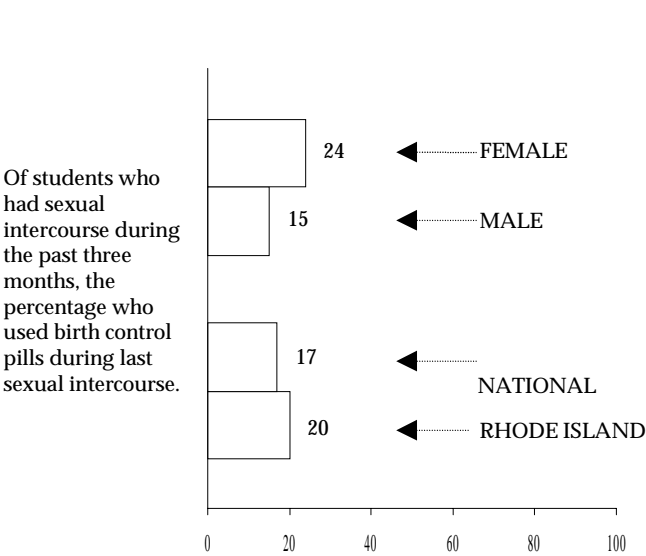
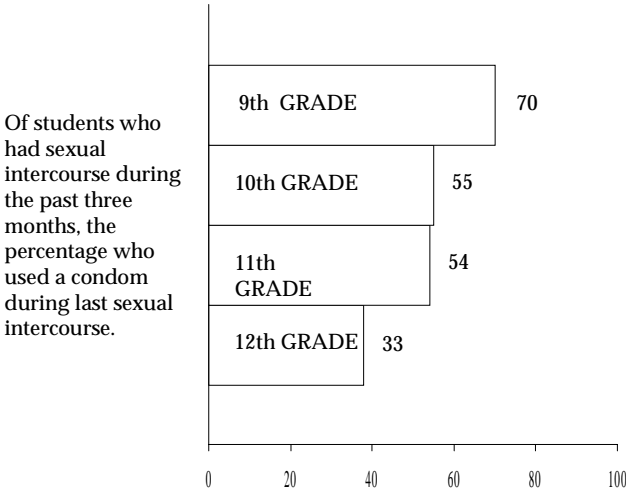
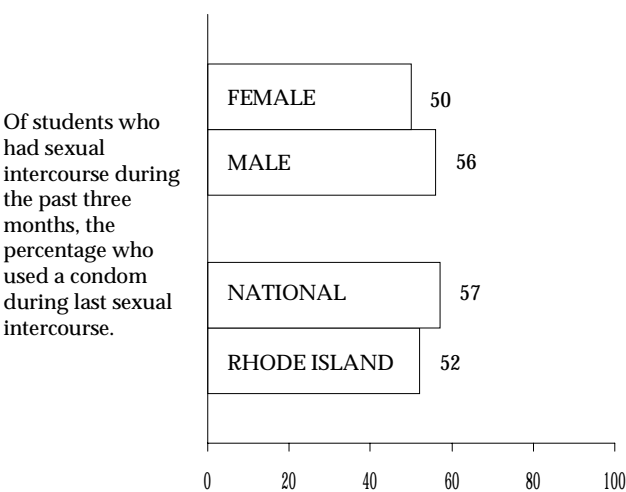
**Rationale:** Early sexual activity and multiple sexual partners are associated with unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV infection, and negative effects on social and psychological development. Alcohol and other drug use may serve as predisposing factors for initiation of sexual activity and unprotected sexual intercourse.



# Sexual Behaviors

**Risk Behavior:** Unprotected sexual intercourse and unintended pregnancy

**Rationale:** More than one million teenage girls in the United States become pregnant each year, just over 400,000 teenagers obtain abortions, and nearly 470,000 give birth. One third of all unintended pregnancies occur among teenagers, and 75% of teenage pregnancies occur among adolescents who are not using contraception. The United States leads all Western developed countries in rates of adolescent pregnancy, abortion, and childbearing.



# Sexual Behaviors

**Risk Behavior:** Lack of HIV/AIDS education

**Rational:** AIDS is the 7th leading cause of years of potential life lost before age 65 in the United States and is the 6th leading cause of death for youth aged 15-24. Of the 12 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) per year, 86% are among people aged 15-29. STDs may result in infertility, adverse effects on pregnancy outcomes and maternal and child health, and facilitation of HIV transmission.

